
The Marmot Recovery Foundation—A Partnership Model for Species Recovery

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Extended Abstract: *Marmota vancouverensis* is Canada's most endangered mammal. It is legally protected and is listed as Endangered under the British Columbia (B.C.) *Wildlife Act* (1980). Most colonies occur on privately-owned lands currently held by TimberWest Forest Corp., Weyerhaeuser Company, and the Mount Washington Alpine Resort. As an endemic species confined to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, *M. vancouverensis* falls under the protection of the Province of British Columbia, which retains ownership and legal responsibility for all Vancouver Island marmots and their progeny under the B.C. *Wildlife Act*.

In 1988, the former B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks (now the B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection) enlisted a group of scientists, biologists, and wildlife managers to develop a recovery plan for the Vancouver Island marmot population. This group later became the Recovery Team, and was given exclusive legal responsibility for managing the Vancouver Island marmot under the B.C. *Wildlife Act*.

The national Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Plan was approved in 1994 and subsequently updated in 2000. It focuses on (1) population restoration through captive breeding and reintroduction of captive-bred marmots to historically occupied sites, (2) monitoring and protection of wild colonies, and (3) habitat protection. The goal of the plan is to establish a wild population of 400–600 free-ranging marmots distributed over three areas of Vancouver Island. This goal is based on our knowledge of the historic distribution of the species and barriers to its dispersal, and the idea that suitable natural habitat exists to support a population in three areas. The Province of British Columbia provides marmots to the captive-breeding program by permit and is ultimately responsible for their welfare.

It was determined during the recovery plan process that recovery efforts would require up to \$15 million over 10–15 years to develop and implement an intensive captive-breeding and reintroduction program, and to build a dedicated marmot recovery center on Mount Washington to quarantine and acclimatize captive-bred animals prior to their release into the wild. It was also clear that because the majority of marmots in the wild were residing on private land, a new approach to recovery that included the private stakeholders was needed.

The growing scale and cost of recovery activities, and the need for effective management and

sound fiscal stewardship resulted in the formation of the Marmot Recovery Foundation in 1998, and the birth of a new partnership model for recovery—a coalition of the provincial government, private landowners, and the public (through the Marmot Recovery Foundation) to fund recovery efforts and gain needed cooperation from the landowners. The strategy was to expand the Recovery Team/government model to include industry and the public as partners to provide an equitable distribution of the burden of responsibility, leveraged opportunities for research and in-kind support, and broad-based long-term commitment to species recovery. The costs are shared equally among the government, forest industry, and public over a 10–15 year period.

The Marmot Recovery Foundation implements the recovery plan as set out by the Recovery Team by providing the necessary expertise to raise funds and carry out the business, administrative, and public awareness activities needed to achieve the plan's objectives. As a public charity, the Foundation provides a direct link to the public, and access to public funding bodies, which provide important fundraising and public outreach opportunities to the recovery project and its partners. By the end of 2003, the Foundation had over 7000 individual donors, 1100 of which participated in the 'adopt a marmot' program. At the end of the Foundation's sixth operational year, public revenues matched government and industry revenues dollar for dollar.

The public, however, provides more than just funding opportunities. It plays a critical role in the recovery of the Vancouver Island marmot by acting as a vigilant public voice, and ensuring that protection of our natural resources is not taken for granted. The public provides a catalyst for action, and is the glue that holds the stakeholders together and strengthens their resolve to succeed. Engagement and participation of the public through fundraising and public education increases the accountability of all of the stakeholders, and prompts them to make their best effort.

The main private landowners who provide industry support are TimberWest Forest Corp., Weyerhaeuser Company, and the Mount Washington Alpine Resort. TimberWest and Weyerhaeuser have provided substantial financial support over the first five years of the recovery plan, and continue to provide support along with the provincial government through the Landowners Partner Fund. Both companies have also participated in land transactions with the province to set aside protected land for Vancouver Island marmot recovery, and are working with the Recovery Team to develop a land stewardship agreement. The total amount of protected land set aside for Vancouver Island marmot recovery is 1276 ha (926 ha at Haley Lake Reserve and 350 ha at Green Mountain).

The recovery plan called for the construction of a dedicated center located in marmot habitat to quarantine and acclimatize captive-born marmots prior to their release to the wild. Construction needed to begin immediately, and before funds could be raised, so the center would be ready in time to receive animals from the captive-breeding program. The provincial government agreed to provide a \$1.2 million construction loan if a suitable location could be found. The other landowner partner, the Mount Washington Alpine Resort, effectively donated the land by offering the Foundation a 20-year land lease for \$10. The Mount Washington Alpine Resort also provides public outreach opportunities to more than 400,000 visitors annually. This

helps raise the profile of the Marmot Recovery Foundation and its partners. The Resort also donates substantial in-kind services to the recovery project on an ongoing basis.

In addition to the partnerships mentioned, the Marmot Recovery Foundation works with technical partners, scientists, and researchers outside of the Recovery Team and Foundation. The main technical and research partners are the Calgary Zoo, the Mountain View Conservation and Breeding Centre, the Toronto Zoo, and the Science Advisory Group at the University of British Columbia's Centre for Biodiversity Research. Working in partnership broadens the scope of the Foundation's conservation efforts, enhances recovery research, and leverages research funding opportunities with the federal government and other institutions.

Although the Vancouver Island marmot is a provincial species, and is under the protection of the provincial government, the federal government was able to assist recovery efforts by supporting the Science Advisory Group research program. Also funded in part by TimberWest, the Science Advisory Group research program provides additional opportunities to cast a wide net throughout the scientific community and leverage research funding and in-kind resources through other institutions.

The main strengths of this partnership approach are (1) it is a unique partnership that does not hold government solely responsible for recovery costs, (2) it provides funding and buy-in by a variety of stakeholders, and provides leveraged funding opportunities from partners who would not likely contribute to government, (3) it provides a direct link to the public and the opportunity to increase the public profile and participation through volunteering and subscriptions, and (4) it provides broad scientific outreach.

It would be unfair, however, not to list some of the challenges of this model. A significant challenge is the initial start-up costs of the program. The equal distribution of the financial burden does not take effect until somewhere around year five of an aggressive public outreach program since it takes several years to launch and build a public campaign. During that start-up period, the balance of the financial responsibility falls on the shoulders of the other partners while the public donations program is being developed. In the long run, a properly developed and managed program will more than make up for the initial shortfall in funding at the start of the project, but the program must make it over that short-term hump.

This model also requires excellent stewardship from the Foundation in managing a coalition partnership with such varied interests, and in ensuring that the partners continue to work collaboratively and cooperatively; however, the investment of significant time and resources by the stakeholders secures their commitment and provides many more opportunities than challenges—opportunities like shared knowledge and research, broadened vision and expertise, leveraged funding opportunities, direct public access, and the self-policing and accountability necessary for good project management. In balance, the opportunities far outweigh the challenges, and the Marmot Recovery Foundation concept may serve well as a model to be considered in other species recovery plans.

Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Team

Doug Janz: B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (Chair)

Sandy Black: Calgary Zoo

Gordon Blankstein: Mountain View Conservation and Breeding Centre

Justin Brashares: Centre for Biodiversity Research, University of British Columbia

John Carnio: Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Drew Chapmen: B.C. Parks

Bob Elner: Canadian Wildlife Service

Dave Fraser: B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

Peter Gibson: Mount Washington Alpine Resort

Colette Howell: Toronto Zoo

Sally Leigh-Spencer: Member at Large

Dave Lindsay: TimberWest Forest Corp.

Ron McLaughlin: Member at Large

Dave Nagorsen: Mammalia Biological Consulting

Helen Schwantje: B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

Dave Shackleton: Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of British Columbia

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Nancy Wilkin: B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

Primary Partners

B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

Environment Canada

Mount Washington Alpine Resort

The Public

TimberWest Forest Corp.

Weyerhaeuser Company

Technical Partners - Captive Breeding

Calgary Zoo

Mountain View Conservation and Breeding Centre

Tony Barrett Mount Washington Marmot Recovery Centre

Toronto Zoo

Research and Science Partners

B.C. and Canadian Wildlife Service

B.C. Conservation Foundation

B.C. Parks

Max Planck Institute, Germany

RENEW (Recovery of Nationally Endangered Wildlife)

Royal British Columbia Museum

Science Advisory Group, Centre for Biodiversity Research, University of British Columbia

TimberWest Forest Corp.

Universities of Alberta, California, Kansas, Kharkov State, Lyons, Vienna, Victoria

Weyerhaeuser Company

World Wildlife Fund Canada